

CPYRGHT

Surprise, Surprise, Surprise

By Henry J. Taylor



A FIRSTHAND look at what really happened to our former Ambassador to Panama Joseph S. Farland should explain much about what confronts President Johnson. And why dangerous event after event abroad is a surprise, surprise surprise to those at the top on whom our security depends.

Ambassador Farland is an ex-FBI agent, counter intelligence expert, chief-of-mission for three and a half years in Panama before returning last August, and acclaimed as one of the most

successful ambassadors we've ever had in Latin America. He resigned last August and returned to private life in Morgantown, W. Va.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk told the House Foreign Affairs Committee (Jan. 15) that he was taken by surprise by events in Panama. The committee asked whether his Department had fully consulted the returned ambassador whose reports had long bristled with information about the Castro buildup and the mounting crisis in the isthmus. "Oh, yes, Mr. Farland has been completely debriefed," Mr. Rusk testified.

Now, obviously, something or someone was wrong some place. Ambassador Farland has stated publicly that he was asked nothing, and had sat around Washington for three solid weeks without being consulted ("de-briefed"). So I asked Mr. Farland to tell me exactly what went on. He agreed to do so.

He said Secretary Rusk in his testimony apparently relied on a subordinate who reported to him after engaging Mr. Farland in "a short, and largely irrelevant conversation," that's all. That State Department man was named Lansing Collins. "We did hardly more than pass the time of day, Mr. Collins and I," Mr. Farland told me.

That the Secretary of State himself admittedly failed to consult Mr. Farland, as CIA Director John A. McCone likewise failed even to see him, was inexplicable. How come?

"When I arrived home in August," Mr. Farland answered, "and the State Department circulated its customary notice to appropriate agencies listing returned ambassadors available for consultation, a man in the White House went to work. His name is

Ralph Dungau. On whose authority he acted, I do not know. But Mr. Dungau phoned the various agencies, including the Pentagon, that I was not to be invited for consultation."

Mr. Farland then coupled this action with a previous event. "Earlier in the Panama crisis," he stated, "when I went to Washington for consultation in the late fall of 1962, Edwin Martin, the then-Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, stepped in. Mr. Martin literally ordered me to have no contact with top CIA executives and any congressional leaders. 'We here in the State department will take care of any discussions about Panama with the CIA ourselves. Further, you are not to have discussions with members of Congress on the Hill', Mr. Martin directed."

Subsequently, Ambassador Farland met President Kennedy during the late President's conference with Latin American presidents at San Salvador last March. "President Kennedy did not know about Mr. Martin's directive to me," Mr. Farland continued, "and in Mr. Martin's presence he crossed up Mr. Martin on the congressional angle while Mr. Martin remained silent. The President told me to see inquiring congressional leaders on my next trip home. I had nothing but courtesy, understanding and, so far as I know, approval from President Kennedy personally and directly."

I asked about the CIA espionage situation, including Castro penetrations in Panama. Mr. Farland described the CIA as an out-of-hand aggregation "underzealous in knowing what was happening in Panama, overzealous in building a CIA empire in the zone." He revealed the additional stops-and-blocks he encountered behind the scenes in trying to bring this agency into line.

"The station chief had exposed himself as a prominent figure in the high social world," Mr. Farland stated, "and it was easy to see that the whole thing was loose. They simply did not know what was going on. I spelled this out repeatedly to both the State Department and CIA's Washington headquarters in terms of isthmus and American security. Neither acted. It took me nearly a year to get the station chief removed — a very decisive and critical year — and then only when CIA Director McCone himself came to Panama and heard the facts direct from me in my house."